

The Church in the New Testament, Teacher's Guide

Lesson 6: Mission and Sending

Acts 13:1-12

Teaching Aim (Teacher Orientation)

Last week the class watched Antioch get built. This week they watch it give itself away. Make the connection explicit as you open, because it is the point: the congregation that was taught for a year in Acts 11 is the congregation that sends its two best men to the nations in Acts 13, and those two facts are not unrelated. A church that will not be taught has nothing worth sending. Notice also the list in verse 1, and let the class look at it slowly. Barnabas, Simeon called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen who grew up with Herod, and Saul. An African, a man raised in a palace, a former persecutor. Lucius is from Cyrene, and the class may remember that men of Cyrene were the ones who first preached to Gentiles in Acts 11:20. This is what the gospel builds: a leadership no human arrangement would ever have assembled.

The doctrinal care in this lesson falls on the miraculous, and it comes up three times. There are prophets in verse 1, the Holy Spirit speaks audibly in verse 2, and Paul strikes a man blind in verse 11. Your class needs a steady, kind word on all three. This is the apostolic age, when God was confirming a word that had not yet been completed and delivered. Prophecy, direct revelation, and miraculous signs belonged to that confirming work (Mark 16:20; Hebrews 2:3-4), and they served their purpose. We are not to expect the Spirit to speak to us as He spoke in verse 2, and we should not teach anyone to wait for it. God has spoken finally in His Son, and the faith was delivered once for all (Hebrews 1:1-2; Jude 3). Set that boundary early so it does not have to be relitigated at every question.

Then aim the lesson where it actually lands, which is verse 12. The proconsul believed, and Luke tells us exactly why: he was “astonished at the teaching of the Lord.” Not at the blindness. The miracle got attention; the teaching produced faith, which is precisely what miracles were always for. Keep that distinction in front of the class, because it explains the whole apostolic age and it explains why we do not need those signs now. Underneath it all, the lesson asks a plain question of the congregation: the mission began while the church was worshiping, and it cost Antioch its two finest teachers. Would we send ours? A church that only ever receives is not the church of Acts 13.

Question 1

Student Question:

In verse 1, the church at Antioch is described as having “prophets and teachers.” What does this tell us about the leadership and spiritual maturity of the Antioch congregation?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Have the class read the names slowly, because Luke is showing them something. Barnabas, whom they met last week. Simeon called Niger, a name meaning black, almost certainly an African. Lucius of Cyrene, from North Africa. Manaen, who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, meaning he came from the household of the man who beheaded John the Baptist. And Saul, who had been dragging Christians to prison a few years earlier. Ask the class what these five men had in common. Nothing. Nothing at all except Christ. No committee assembles a group like this. The gospel does.

Point out the detail the class may miss: Lucius is from Cyrene, and back in Acts 11:20 it was “men of Cyprus and Cyrene” who first dared to preach to Greeks at Antioch. Barnabas, we are told in Acts 4:36, was from Cyprus. There is a good chance we are looking at the unnamed pioneers of Lesson 5, still there, now leading. Luke does not say so outright, but the overlap is worth letting the class see. The men who took the risk stayed to build.

Now handle the word “prophets,” because the class needs a clear word and this is the first of three places in this lesson where it matters. Prophets in the New Testament were men who received and spoke direct revelation from God. That was a genuine miraculous gift, and it was necessary at a time when the New Testament had not yet been written and a congregation of former pagans had no completed Scripture to consult. Prophecy belonged to the age of confirmation, along with tongues and healing, and Paul says plainly that prophecies would pass away (1 Corinthians 13:8-10). We do not have prophets today, and we do not need them. What they delivered, we possess: the completed, sufficient word (2 Timothy 3:16-17; Jude 3). Say that kindly but without hedging, because a great deal of confusion in the religious world starts right here.

Then draw out what the class should take from the pairing. Prophets and teachers, side by side. Revelation and instruction. God gave the message and then had it taught, patiently, over a year, as the class saw last week. Even in an age of miraculous gifts, the ordinary work of teaching was indispensable. That should tell your class something about the value of the teaching work they still have.

Bring it near. Antioch was mature enough to be led by men from utterly different worlds who trusted each other, and mature enough that the leadership was plural rather than resting on one man. Ask the class what it says about our own congregation that we tend to gather with people like us, and what it would cost to have a Manaen and a Simeon in the same room, at peace.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The five men in verse 1 came from radically different backgrounds; only Christ could have assembled them (Acts 13:1)
- Leadership at Antioch was plural, not centered on one man
- New Testament prophets received and spoke direct revelation from God
- Prophecy was a confirming gift of the apostolic age and has ceased (1 Corinthians 13:8-10)

- We possess what the prophets delivered: the complete and sufficient Scriptures (2 Timothy 3:16-17; Jude 3)
- Even in an age of miraculous gifts, ordinary teaching remained indispensable

Discussion Prompts

- What does it say about us that we tend to gather with people like ourselves?
- How would you explain to a friend why we do not have prophets today?
- Why did a church with prophets still need teachers?

Question 2

Student Question:

Verse 2 says they were “worshiping the Lord and fasting” when the Holy Spirit spoke. What does this teach about the relationship between a church’s devotional life and its openness to God’s direction?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Start with where the mission began, because it is not where we would have started it. The greatest missionary movement in history did not begin in a planning meeting. It began while a congregation was worshiping the Lord. Luke’s word carries the sense of serving or ministering to God. They were not strategizing about the nations; they were attending to God, and God interrupted them with the nations. Help the class feel the order, because we habitually reverse it. We decide what we want to do and then ask God to bless it.

Notice what they were not doing. They were not asking for direction. There is no indication they had a missions question on the table. They were simply doing what a faithful church does, and in the middle of it God spoke. That is worth pausing on. The congregation was not positioned for a breakthrough; it was just being faithful in the ordinary work of worship, which is precisely where God found them ready.

Take up fasting honestly, since the class will wonder. Fasting appears in the New Testament without ever being commanded of Christians. It is not bound on us, and no one should be made to feel unfaithful for not practicing it. But notice that it also is not forbidden or discouraged, and it appears here and again in verse 3 at moments of real weight. Jesus assumed His disciples would fast and warned only against doing it to be seen (Matthew 6:16-18). What fasting expresses is seriousness, a deliberate setting aside of ordinary appetites because something matters more. Teach it that way: not as a law, and not as a technique to make God speak, but as what earnestness sometimes looks like.

Now set the boundary the class needs, and set it plainly, because this verse is heavily misused. The Holy Spirit spoke, directly and audibly, presumably through one of the prophets in verse 1. That is not a promise to us. This is the apostolic age, when God directed His messengers because

His word was not yet complete. We should not teach anyone to wait for the Spirit to speak, to expect an inner voice, or to interpret an impression as God's direction. God has spoken finally in His Son, the faith has been delivered once for all, and Scripture equips us completely (Hebrews 1:1-2; Jude 3; 2 Timothy 3:16-17). A Christian who says "the Spirit told me" has said something the New Testament will not underwrite.

But do not let the boundary rob the class of the lesson, because it survives intact. God still directs His church, and He does it through a completed word that we hear best when we are actually attending to Him. A congregation absorbed in itself will not notice what God has already said. Ask the class the honest question: when did we last make a significant decision after real worship and prayer, rather than after a discussion in which God was mentioned at the end?

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The mission began in worship, not in planning; God interrupted a church attending to Him (Acts 13:2)
- They were not seeking direction; they were being ordinarily faithful
- Fasting is neither commanded nor forbidden for Christians; it expresses earnestness (Matthew 6:16-18)
- Fasting is not a technique for making God speak
- The Spirit's direct speech belongs to the apostolic age, before the word was complete
- God now directs His church through the completed, sufficient Scriptures, not through impressions or inner voices (Hebrews 1:1-2; Jude 3; 2 Timothy 3:16-17)

Discussion Prompts

- When did we last make a real decision after worship and prayer rather than after a discussion?
- How would you respond to someone who says "the Spirit told me" to do something?
- Why does a church absorbed in itself miss what God has already said?

Question 3

Student Question:

The Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them" (v. 2). What does this reveal about the origin and authority behind the church's missionary work?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Have the class notice the pronouns, because they carry the doctrine. "Set apart for me... the work to which I have called them." God does not ask Antioch to consider a mission or to select candidates. He announces a decision already made about men He has already called. The church

is being informed and asked to release, not consulted. Help the class see that the mission is God's from beginning to end, and that Antioch's role, real as it is, is downstream of God's.

Then let the class feel what was being asked. Look again at verse 1 and count who is left. Antioch had five prophets and teachers, and God asks for two of them, including Barnabas, who is almost certainly the most beloved man in that congregation, and Saul, whom Barnabas had personally gone to fetch from Tarsus. Sixty percent of the leadership stays; the best forty percent walks out the door. This is not a church sending its spare capacity. It is a church giving away its finest.

Draw out the word "set apart," because it is precise. It means to mark off for a purpose. God is not creating a superior class of Christian; He is designating men for a task. And notice that the calling had already happened: "the work to which I have called them." Saul had been told at his conversion that he was a chosen instrument to carry Christ's name before the Gentiles (Acts 9:15). What happens in Acts 13 is not the beginning of the call. It is the church catching up with what God had said years earlier.

Set the boundary once more, briefly, since the class has now had it twice. This calling came by direct revelation because the word was not yet complete. No Christian today should wait for that kind of call before serving, and none is coming. Our call is in the book: go and make disciples (Matthew 28:19-20), preach the word (2 Timothy 4:2), be ready to give a defense (1 Peter 3:15). People sometimes use "I have not been called" as a reason to do nothing. The New Testament has already answered.

Then put the weight where the class needs it. If the mission is God's and the workers are God's, then a congregation does not own its members. We hold them for a while. Ask the class what our congregation would do if God asked for our two best people. Most churches would find a reason to keep them, and the reason would sound spiritual.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The mission originates with God; the church is informed and asked to release, not consulted (Acts 13:2)
- God asked for two of Antioch's five leaders, including its best; this was not spare capacity
- "Set apart" designates men for a task; it does not create a superior class of Christian
- The call preceded this moment; Saul had been chosen years earlier (Acts 9:15)
- Direct calling by revelation belongs to the apostolic age; no Christian should wait for one today
- Our commission is already given in Scripture (Matthew 28:19-20; 2 Timothy 4:2; 1 Peter 3:15)
- A congregation does not own its members; it holds them for God

Discussion Prompts

- What would our congregation do if God asked for our two best people?
- How would you answer someone who says he has not been called to serve?
- Why does it matter that God had already called Saul years before Antioch acted?

Question 4

Student Question:

In verse 3, the church fasted, prayed, and laid hands on Barnabas and Saul before sending them. What is the significance of this process, and what does it teach about how mission work should begin?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Point the class back to Lesson 3, because they have seen this before. The apostles prayed and laid hands on the seven in Acts 6:6, and here the church at Antioch does the same for Barnabas and Saul. The gesture means what it meant there: public identification and commissioning. These men, for this work, with this congregation behind them. It is not a sacrament, it does not confer grace, and it does not create a clergy class. It is the church saying visibly and publicly, these are ours and we stand behind them.

Notice how deliberate the process was. They had heard from God in verse 2, and they still fasted and prayed before acting. Certainty did not make them casual. There is a lesson there for congregations that either agonize endlessly over decisions or make them carelessly; Antioch did neither. They took it seriously, they took it to God, and then they acted.

Now draw out something easy to miss. Notice who sends. Verse 3 says the church “sent them off,” and verse 4 says they were “sent out by the Holy Spirit.” Both are true, and Luke sees no tension. God sends, and He sends through a congregation that recognizes His will and acts on it. Help the class see that this is how God normally works: not around His people but through them. The church did not originate the mission, and the mission did not bypass the church.

Then let the class feel the cost embedded in the ritual. Laying hands on someone and sending him away is not a ceremony of gain; it is a ceremony of loss. Antioch was releasing men it loved and needed, and doing it with prayer rather than with reluctance. A congregation that sends only what it can spare has not really sent anything. Sending is supposed to cost.

Bring it home practically. Ask the class what our congregation does when someone leaves to do gospel work elsewhere. Do we mark it, pray over it, stand behind it, keep supporting it? Or does the person simply drift out of our life and become someone else’s business? Acts 13:3 says a sending is an act of the whole church, done in the open, with hands and prayers on it.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Laying on of hands is public identification and commissioning, as in Acts 6:6

- It is not a sacrament, confers no grace, and creates no clergy class
- Certainty about God's will did not make the church casual; they still fasted and prayed
- The church sent, and the Holy Spirit sent; God works through His people rather than around them (Acts 13:3-4)
- Sending is an act of loss, done publicly, by the whole congregation
- A church that sends only what it can spare has not truly sent

Discussion Prompts

- What do we do when someone leaves us to do gospel work elsewhere?
- Why did a church that had already heard from God still fast and pray?
- If sending is supposed to cost, what has our sending cost us lately?

Question 5

Student Question:

Verse 4 says they were "sent out by the Holy Spirit." How does understanding that missionaries are sent by God—not merely by human decision—change the way we view mission work?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Put verses 3 and 4 side by side for the class and let them notice the apparent tension. Verse 3: the church "sent them off." Verse 4: "being sent out by the Holy Spirit, they went down to Seleucia." Which is it? Both, and Luke moves between them without a word of explanation, because to him there is nothing to explain. God sends. He does it through a congregation. The human act and the divine act are the same event seen from two sides.

Draw out what that does to the work. If men send a missionary, then the work is ours: our project, our investment, ours to evaluate, ours to abandon when it disappoints. If the Holy Spirit sends, the work is God's, and everything changes. It means He is responsible for the results, which takes an unbearable weight off the workers. It means opposition is aimed at Him rather than at them, which the class will see immediately in the next few verses. And it means no one gets to quit because it stopped being convenient.

Then let the class see what it does to the sending church, because this is where it bites. If God sent them, Antioch cannot treat this as charity or as an optional program to be funded when there is surplus. They are not patrons of a good cause. They are participants in something God started, and their support is not generosity but partnership. Paul says exactly this to the Philippians, thanking them for their "partnership in the gospel from the first day until now" (Philippians 1:5), and telling them their gift was "a fragrant offering, a sacrifice acceptable and pleasing to God" (Philippians 4:18). The money went to Paul; the offering went to God.

Guard the class against a misuse. This does not mean every self-declared missionary is sent by God, or that any work claiming divine sending is above evaluation. We are not told to accept

claims; we are told to test them against the word (1 John 4:1; Acts 17:11). The Spirit sent Barnabas and Saul to preach the gospel that had been delivered, and the way we recognize God's work now is that it matches what He has already said.

Bring it near the class. Ask them how they think of our congregation's support for gospel work elsewhere. Is it a line item we are glad to fund, or is it our work being done somewhere else by people we sent? Those two attitudes look identical on a budget and are completely different in the heart.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The church sent and the Spirit sent; these are one event seen from two sides (Acts 13:3-4)
- If God sends, the work is His: He owns the results, and opposition is aimed at Him
- The sending church is a partner in the gospel, not a patron of a good cause (Philippians 1:5)
- Support given to gospel workers is an offering pleasing to God (Philippians 4:18)
- Claims of divine sending are not above testing; everything is measured by the word (1 John 4:1; Acts 17:11)
- The Spirit sends people to preach the gospel already delivered, not a new message

Discussion Prompts

- Is mission work a line item we fund, or our work being done elsewhere by people we sent?
- How does "God sent them" change who carries the weight of the results?
- How do we test whether a work is God's without becoming cynical about it?

Question 6

Student Question:

In verses 5–6, Barnabas and Saul begin by proclaiming the word of God in synagogues. Why did they consistently begin with the Jewish community, and what does this teach about strategy in evangelism?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Give the class the practical reasons first, because they are sensible and Luke expects us to see them. In the synagogue they would find people who already believed in the one true God, who knew the Scriptures, who were waiting for a Messiah, and who had the very texts Paul needed to make his argument. He did not have to establish that God exists or that the prophets speak for Him. He could open Isaiah 53 and go straight to Jesus, exactly as Philip did in Lesson 4. It was not favoritism; it was the shortest road to the point.

Then give the deeper reason, which is theological. Paul states it flatly in Romans 1:16, that the gospel is "the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek." The promises came through Israel. The Messiah was theirs by covenant and lineage.

In Acts 13:46 Paul will say to those who reject him at Antioch of Pisidia, "It was necessary that the word of God be spoken first to you." Necessary. This was not merely convenient; it was the fitting order of a promise being kept.

Notice also the detail in verse 5: "And they had John to assist them." That is John Mark, and the class should file the name away. He will abandon them shortly (Acts 13:13), Paul and Barnabas will split over him (Acts 15:37-39), and years later Paul will ask for him because he is "very useful to me for ministry" (2 Timothy 4:11). Luke drops him into a list of travel details, and he becomes one of the great restoration stories in the New Testament. Even here, someone unpromising is being carried along.

Now draw out the principle carefully, because the class may over-apply it. There is such a thing as wise strategy in evangelism. Paul thought about where to go, whom to address, and how to begin, and he began where the ground was prepared. But strategy never became a filter that excluded anyone. He went to the synagogue first, and then to the marketplace, the riverside, the Areopagus, a jail cell at midnight, and a proconsul's residence. Wise starting points are not the same as narrow targets.

Bring it home. Ask the class where the prepared ground is around them, the people who already believe something true and need someone to show them where it leads. Every one of us knows someone reading their own Isaiah 53 and getting nowhere. Starting there is not lack of courage. It is what Paul did.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The synagogue offered people who knew Scripture and awaited a Messiah; it was the shortest road to Christ
- The gospel was to the Jew first, and this order was necessary rather than merely convenient (Romans 1:16; Acts 13:46)
- The promises came through Israel, and the Messiah was theirs by covenant
- John Mark appears here, later deserts, and is finally restored as useful for ministry (Acts 13:13; 15:37-39; 2 Timothy 4:11)
- Wise strategy in evangelism is legitimate, but it never became a filter excluding anyone
- Paul preached in synagogues, marketplaces, riversides, jails, and before officials alike

Discussion Prompts

- Where is the prepared ground around you, the person who already believes something true?
- How is a wise starting point different from a narrow target?
- John Mark deserted and was later called useful. Who in your life deserves that kind of patience?

Question 7

Student Question:

In verses 6–8, they encounter Bar-Jesus (Elymas), a false prophet who opposes them. Why does the gospel consistently provoke opposition, and how should missionaries expect to face resistance?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Have the class notice where the opposition was standing. Elymas was “with the proconsul,” attached to the most powerful man on the island, and verse 8 says he “opposed them, seeking to turn the proconsul away from the faith.” This was not a random skeptic. He had access, influence, and a livelihood built on the proconsul’s attention, and the gospel threatened all three. Ask the class to notice that pattern, because it is nearly universal: opposition usually comes from whoever has something invested in things staying as they are.

Draw out why the gospel provokes this. It is not because Christians are unpleasant, though we sometimes are. It is because the gospel announces a Lord, and a Lord has claims. The silversmiths at Ephesus rioted when their trade was threatened (Acts 19:24-27). The Sanhedrin moved against the apostles when their authority was undermined. The message that Jesus is Lord and Christ is a direct challenge to whatever else is running a person’s life, and people defend their kingdoms. Jesus told His disciples the world hated Him first and would hate them too (John 15:18-20).

Then tell the class what Luke is really showing them, because Elymas is not the point. Verse 10 has Paul calling him a “son of the devil” and an “enemy of all righteousness,” which is strong language and deliberate. Behind the man is the adversary. Paul says our struggle is not against flesh and blood (Ephesians 6:12), and this scene is a small picture of the whole book: wherever the word goes, the enemy is already there, usually standing next to whoever matters most.

Now shape the class’s expectations, because this is where the lesson lands. Opposition is not a sign that something has gone wrong. Paul said, “all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted” (2 Timothy 3:12). Christians who assume that faithfulness produces smooth conditions will conclude, the first time they meet real resistance, that they have made a mistake or that God has abandoned them. Neither is true. Resistance is the normal weather of gospel work.

But guard the balance carefully, because the class can misuse this too. Opposition is not proof that we are right. Some people are opposed because they are obnoxious, careless, or wrong, and they comfort themselves by calling it persecution. Peter says plainly, let none of you suffer as an evildoer or a meddler, but if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed (1 Peter 4:15-16). The question is never merely whether we are resisted. It is whether we are resisted for Christ.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Elymas had access, influence, and livelihood tied to the proconsul; the gospel threatened all three (Acts 13:6-8)
- The gospel provokes opposition because it announces a Lord with claims on everything
- Behind human opposition stands a real adversary; the struggle is not against flesh and blood (Ephesians 6:12)
- Jesus told His disciples to expect the world's hatred (John 15:18-20)
- Persecution is normal for the godly, not evidence that something has gone wrong (2 Timothy 3:12)
- Opposition is not proof of being right; suffering as a meddler or evildoer is not persecution (1 Peter 4:15-16)

Discussion Prompts

- Who has something invested in things staying exactly as they are around you?
- Have you ever mistaken being disliked for being persecuted? How do we tell the difference?
- Why would a message about a Lord provoke people more than a message about ideas?

Question 8

Student Question:

In verses 9–11, Paul confronts Elymas directly and strikes him with blindness. What does this confrontation teach about the seriousness of opposing the truth?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Let the class feel how severe this is, because we tend to soften it. Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, looks at the man and says: “You son of the devil, you enemy of all righteousness, full of all deceit and villainy, will you not stop making crooked the straight paths of the Lord?” That is not how we are taught to speak to opponents, and the class will be uncomfortable. Sit in it rather than explaining it away. There are moments when clarity is the kindest thing available, and Paul judged this to be one.

Ask the class why this drew such a response when Paul was elsewhere so patient. The answer is in verse 8: Elymas was “seeking to turn the proconsul away from the faith.” This was not a man with honest questions or an inherited error. He was deliberately standing between a searching soul and the gospel, for his own advantage. Jesus reserved His hardest words for exactly this: religious men who “shut the kingdom of heaven in people’s faces” and would neither enter nor let others in (Matthew 23:13). To damage yourself is one thing. To block someone else is another.

Now handle the miracle carefully, because this is the third place in the lesson where the class needs the boundary. Paul struck a man blind. That is an apostolic sign, part of the confirming work of that age (Hebrews 2:3-4; 2 Corinthians 12:12), and it is not a power any Christian holds today. Nobody should read this and imagine calling down judgment on an opponent. In fact,

Scripture forbids us the posture entirely: “Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God” (Romans 12:19). What Paul did by revelation and apostolic authority is precisely what we are told not to attempt.

Then point out the mercy hidden in the judgment, because the class will miss it. “You will be blind and unable to see the sun for a time.” For a time. It was not permanent. And note who is speaking: a man who was himself struck blind on a road to Damascus, led by the hand into a city, and who came out of that darkness a preacher. Paul of all people knew what temporary blindness could do to a man. This reads less like destruction and more like the same severe mercy that had been shown to him.

Bring it home without letting the class turn it into a license. The point is not that we should be harsh. It is that opposing the truth is a serious matter and God treats it as one. Ask the class the searching version: are we standing between anyone and Christ? Not deliberately, as Elymas did, but by our example, our bitterness, our silence. It is possible to make the straight paths of the Lord crooked without ever intending to.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Paul’s severity answered a man deliberately blocking a soul from the gospel (Acts 13:8-10)
- Jesus reserved His hardest words for those who shut the kingdom in people’s faces (Matthew 23:13)
- The blinding was an apostolic confirming sign, not a power available to Christians today (Hebrews 2:3-4; 2 Corinthians 12:12)
- Christians are forbidden to avenge themselves; vengeance belongs to God (Romans 12:19)
- The judgment was temporary, and Paul had himself been blinded and restored
- Opposing the truth is serious; God does not treat it lightly
- It is possible to obstruct someone’s path to Christ without intending to

Discussion Prompts

- Are we standing between anyone and Christ without meaning to?
- Why did Paul, so patient elsewhere, speak this way here?
- What does “for a time” suggest about the purpose of the blindness?

Question 9

Student Question:

Verse 12 says the proconsul Sergius Paulus “believed, being astonished at the teaching of the Lord.” What ultimately persuaded him—the miracle or the message? Why does this distinction matter?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Make the class read the verse twice, because the answer is right there and it is not what anyone expects. A man has just been struck blind in front of him. And Luke says the proconsul believed, “being astonished at the teaching of the Lord.” Not astonished at the blindness. At the teaching. The miracle happened, and Luke tells us what actually produced the faith, and it was the message.

Now show the class why this single phrase explains the entire apostolic age. Miracles never existed to create faith by themselves; they existed to authenticate the messenger so that his message would be heard. Mark says the disciples “went out and preached everywhere, while the Lord worked with them and confirmed the message by accompanying signs” (Mark 16:20). Hebrews says the salvation declared by the Lord was “attested to us by those who heard, while God also bore witness by signs and wonders and various miracles” (Hebrews 2:3-4). The sign gets attention; the word does the saving. Faith comes by hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ (Romans 10:17).

Let the class test that against the Gospels, because it holds up remarkably. Thousands watched Jesus feed them and walked away. His own brothers saw His miracles and did not believe (John 7:5). Men watched Lazarus walk out of a tomb and went to plot Jesus’ death (John 11:45-53). Jesus said of the rich man’s brothers, “If they do not hear Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be convinced if someone should rise from the dead” (Luke 16:31). Signs never yet made a believer out of someone unwilling to hear.

Draw the conclusion the class needs. If miracles confirmed the word, then once the word is confirmed and complete, their purpose is served. That is why we do not need them now and why the New Testament said they would cease (1 Corinthians 13:8-10). We are not missing something the early church had. We have the very thing their miracles existed to authenticate: the finished, confirmed word. This should feel to your class like an enormous relief rather than a deprivation.

Then make it personal, because it changes how we evangelize. If the teaching is what persuades, then we do not need something spectacular to reach our neighbor. We are not waiting for God to do something dramatic to open a door. Sergius Paulus was the most powerful man on Cyprus, surrounded by a magician who did impressive things, and what moved him was hearing the truth about Jesus. Ask the class whether they believe that, because how they answer determines whether they will ever open their mouths.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Luke says the proconsul was astonished at the teaching, not at the miracle (Acts 13:12)
- Miracles authenticated the messenger so the message would be heard (Mark 16:20; Hebrews 2:3-4)
- Faith comes by hearing the word of Christ (Romans 10:17)
- Signs never produced faith in the unwilling; many saw Jesus’ miracles and did not believe (John 7:5; 11:45-53; Luke 16:31)

- Since miracles confirmed the word, their purpose ended when the word was complete (1 Corinthians 13:8-10)
- We are not deprived; we possess the very word the signs existed to confirm
- Because the teaching persuades, evangelism needs no spectacle

Discussion Prompts

- Do you actually believe the teaching is enough to reach your neighbor? How would we know?
- Why did so many people watch Jesus' miracles and still not believe?
- If miracles confirmed the word, what does that say about our need for them now?

Question 10

Student Question:

Looking at Acts 13:1–12 as a whole, what does this passage teach about the church's responsibility to support, send, and sustain gospel workers?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Have the class walk the whole sequence and name each move. A church worshiped. God spoke. The church fasted and prayed. It laid hands on its two best men and let them go. They went, sent by the Spirit and by the church at once. They preached, they were opposed, and a man believed because of the teaching. That is the cycle, and it starts and ends with a congregation that was more interested in God's work than in its own strength.

Point at the cost again, because the class should not leave without feeling it. Antioch did not send surplus. It sent Barnabas, the man who had held them together, and Saul, whom Barnabas had gone a hundred miles to find. The church that had spent a year being taught by these two men gave both of them away. Ask the class plainly: would we? Most congregations send what they will not miss, and call it mission.

Then draw out the sustaining, because sending is not the end of the responsibility. Luke tells us later that Paul and Barnabas came back to Antioch and "declared all that God had done with them" (Acts 14:26-27), which means the sending church stayed connected and heard the report. Paul's letters are full of this: the Philippians partnered with him from the first day and sent again and again (Philippians 4:15-16); John commends those who support workers so that "we may be fellow workers for the truth" (3 John 5-8). Sending without sustaining is abandonment with a ceremony attached.

Name the pattern the class should carry. Mission begins in worship, not in ambition. It is God's work done through a congregation, not a program the church invents. It costs the church its best. It is confirmed and supported by the whole body publicly. It proceeds by preaching the word, expects opposition, and trusts the teaching rather than the spectacle. That is the New

Testament shape of it, and we are not free to redesign it around what we can comfortably afford.

End with the mirror, and let both questions sit. First: what would God have to ask of us before our support of gospel work actually cost us something? And second, the one this lesson has been aiming at from verse 2: our mission began while a church was worshiping the Lord. What is ours beginning in?

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The cycle: worship, hearing God, prayer, public sending, preaching, opposition, faith through the teaching
- Antioch sent its best, not its surplus, at real cost to itself
- The sending church stayed connected and received the report (Acts 14:26-27)
- Support is ongoing partnership, not a single act (Philippians 4:15-16; 3 John 5-8)
- Sending without sustaining is abandonment with a ceremony attached
- Mission begins in worship, not in ambition, and is God's work done through the congregation
- The pattern is not ours to redesign around what we can comfortably afford

Discussion Prompts

- What would God have to ask before our support of gospel work actually cost us something?
- Our mission began while a church was worshiping. What is ours beginning in?
- Would we send our two best people? Be honest about the reasons we would give.